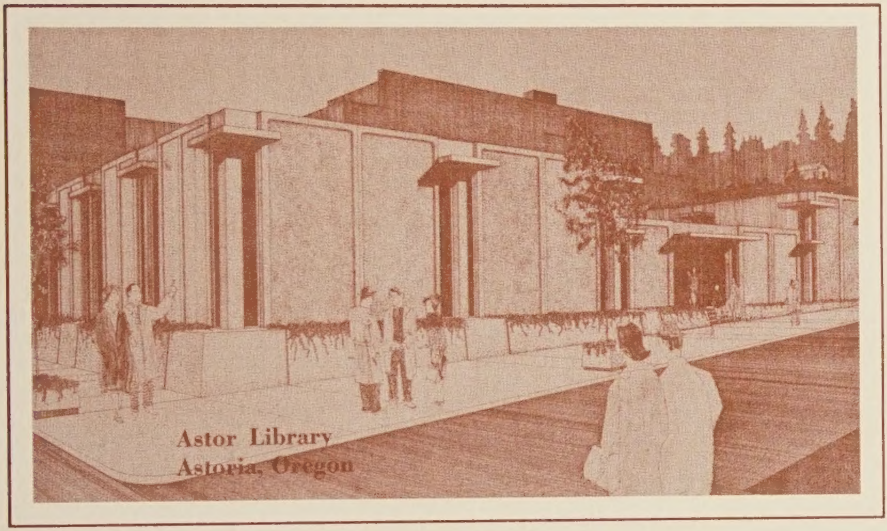
CENTENNIAL HISTORY
of the
ASTORIA PUBLIC LIBRARY
1992



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Astoria Public Library

Books, books, books, magazines, audio-visual materials, historical and genealogical files, and rows of research and reference data. All these, more than 85,000 items, make up the Astoria Public Library collection.

The first mention of a local public library occurred in the *Weekly Astorian*, December 8, 1877. "The Good Templars Association met Monday evening to report on their labors in establishing a free library . . . Soon we will have a long-needed necessity, a fine, free library accessible to all." The report further stated that a public reading room would reduce drunkenness because drinkers would choose to read instead. Apparently this prediction didn't materialize, for six months later the Good Templars withdrew their support because pool tables were moved into the reading room.

The next recorded event in library development took place in 1891. When once again the need for a public reading room was expressed the Astoria Chapter of the Young Women's Christian Temperance Union took up the cause. On February 6, 1892, Articles of Incorporation were signed making the Astoria Public Library a legal organization with duration unlimited. Attorney George C. Fulton served as notary public. Thus the Astoria Public Library was born.

The Women Worked With A Will

To make their dream come true, the fifteen women in the group, led by Dora Badollet, treasurer, had to raise money to buy books and pay rent. They put on programs, sponsored pie socials and bazaars, and held book receptions to which guests brought books to donate. When the date of incorporation arrived, the ladies were ready - 462 volumes on hand with an estimated value of $800.00 and a converted storeroom in the rear of the Kinney Building on the northeast corner of 11th and Commercial streets. At least a dozen of those books still reside in the library archives.

Since theirs was a private corporation with no public fundings, the members' money-raising efforts had to continue. They dubbed their project a subscription library with annual fees of $3.00 per member or fifty cents a month. At no time during that first year were there more than twelve subscribers, but the free reading room was well patronized. However, use by children was discouraged by a rule stating "only those persons over ten years of age are welcome."

Before the end of the first year, larger quarters were needed.

Photo courtesy of Clatsop County Historical Society

KINNEY BUILDING

First home of Astoria Public Library was in a back storeroom of the Kinney Building shown at left in this view of Commerical Street looking east from 11th Street. Mrs. Marshall J. Kinney was one of the active members of Young Women's Christian Temperance Union

Accordingly on January 27, 1893, the Corporation signed a two-year lease with Capt. Hiram Brown and Attorney Charles Page to rent "that certain storeroom under the Irving Club" in the Brown-Page Building located on the northwest corner of 11th and Duane. Rent was $25.00 per month.

From the very first the ladies conducted themselves with high professionalism and awesome dedication. To promote library use, they published a catalogue of books available. Some of these early titles were *Ben Hur*, *Ten Nights in a Barroom*, *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, and *Little Men - Little Women* series, and many volumes of biography and history. Romance novels also had their shelf, such as *St. Elmo*, *Banned and Blessed*, *He Fell in Love with His Wife*, and others which doubtless some patrons read surreptitiously.

Always and always, the workers had to initiate ways to make money. One event aroused much public participation. It was called a Loan Exhibition, to which public spirited citizens were invited to bring their household treasures for viewers to enjoy, for a fee. The printed program, still in library files, lists a total of 1314 items displayed. What a list! It would send today's antique buffs into ecstasy - quilts that crossed the plains, a cup and saucer brought over on the Mayflower, two Cleveland Rockwell paintings, statuary from Italy, and mirrors from France. Indians brought old tribal art work and members of the Chinese community loaned rare china. Housewives displayed their fine silver, embroidery work, and millinery. No record reveals the amount of profit, but such a momentous undertaking must certainly have enhanced the community appreciation of the library.

OLD CITY HALL

While this was Astoria's City Hall, 1905-38, the Public Library occupied quarters on the second floor. The building, 1618 Exchange Street, is now the Heritage Museum.

NEED FOR MORE SPACE BROUGHT ANOTHER MOVE

In 1905, Astoria city offices moved to its fine new building on the corner of 16th and Exchange (presently occupied by the Heritage Museum). Although the library was still operated by a private corporation, arrangements were made for it to occupy a large room on the second floor, so after years in the Brown-Page building, the expanding service enjoyed more space and better lighting, even though patrons had to climb the broad stairway. However, the move was

fortunate for the preservation of the collection, for both earlier locations were devastated by the 1922 Fire.

In 1908, the library organization took another big step forward. Board members made a contract with the city which enabled them to provide free service to all city residents. No longer was checkout service limited to those who had paid their $3.00 dues. Then five years later, in the light of growing library use and increasing difficulty in private fund raising and the prospect of a one-half mill tax levy, the Library Corporation turned over all its collection and equipment to the City of Astoria. Thus after 22 years of devoted effort by private supporters, the library became a department of the City of Astoria.

By the transfer, January 1, 1914, the Library Corporation, or Association, as it was called, turned over to the City 5,300 volumes along with book stands and racks, lighting fixtures, and massive furnishings. In return, the City, in an agreement signed by Mayor Edward H. Gray, levied for library purposes a tax of one-half mill on all taxable property within the city. This tax rate continued till 1919 when a six percent increase was approved for all city departments.

Services And Staff Were Expanded

For thirty-three years the Astoria Public Library remained on the second floor of City Hall where space had to be expanded several times. Usage increased to the point where listed borrowers totaled more than 4000, almost half the population of the city. During many of those thirty-three years, from 1919 to 1941, library services were headed, for the first time, by a professional librarian. Katherine Chenet Barker had received her training in Wisconsin. By her own expertise and enthusiasm, and with the help of two able assistants, the collection grew, and so did the services. A lending station set up on Alameda Avenue drew many new patrons from that end of town.

The Library Moved Again

In January 1938, City offices left their deteriorating quarters in the old city hall for the newly renovated building at 11th and Duane. Likewise, the library had to move, finding a very fortunate location on the main floor of the Elks building, 11th and Exchange. In these spacious quarters, modern and on street level, the library flourished.

Further growth was stimulated when in 1939, the Clatsop County

League of Women Voters sponsored a movement to create a county library. In 1941 a county library became a reality by a vote of the County Court. Regular visits of the bookmobile throughout rural areas were eagerly awaited and freely patronized. The project was financed by the city and the county, each paying half the cost. By the end of fiscal year 1947-48, this city-county library had reached a circulation of 122, 000 volumes with more than half going to county residents by means of the bookmobile.

Then in the postwar downturn in the economy, the county withdrew a large portion of its pledge, later restoring it, but asking that a request for tax money be placed on the 1952 ballot. The city voters passed the bill, but county voters turned it down. In 1954, Friends of the Library undertook a similar campaign with the same result. Thereafter, library services had to be limited to city patrons only, except for those county residents who paid a user fee for the privilege of checking out books.

The Wish For A County Library Would Not Go Away

While the Astoria Public Library was struggling with its post-war problems, enthusiasm for a county-wide library with its own new building was showing up in a new quarter. County veterans' groups felt a need to show their appreciation for the sacrifices of Clatsop men and women in the Armed Services. A consensus was reached. They would build a Clatsop County Veterans' Memorial Library including space for a historical museum, a meeting room, and a special memorial niche to honor those who had given their lives. A comprehensive organization was quickly formed with representatives from various communities and organizations throughout the county with M.R. Chessman as president.

The next step was raising money, hopefully $300,000.00. Donations started to come in quickly. Some donors gave war bonds they had purchased earlier. Industries like Crown Zellerbach and Union Fishermen's Co-op Packing Company gave generously, as did local businesses and individuals. In 1947, pledges paid amounted to $19,199, but as enthusiasm waned, so did the income which, in 1952, amounted to only $19.00.

Then in 1953, Mrs. Frank Fowler, a former Portland attorney, was elected president. She with officers Neil Morfitt and W.P. O'Brien initiated a pledge campaign. Morfitt went to the City Council with the proposal that a system of pinball machines be set up in the city and

throughout the county with proceeds going to the library fund. Discussion ran high with Commissioner James Hogg declaring, "When we descend to this level to finance a library, we'd better do without one." However little by little, the amount on hand climbed to $50,000 including a $10,000 trust fund by the American Legion.

O'Brien as treasurer made heroic efforts to get money from distant sources. He wrote to the Field Foundation in Chicago and the Carnegie Foundation in New York, receiving negative replies from each, the latter stating in a wry tone that they had discontinued building Carnegie libraries forty years earlier (1917). He wrote to Senator Richard Neuberger and Oregon Attorney General Robert Y. Thornton asking if federal and state funds were available. They were not.

In the meantime two areas of discussion were developing. One came from some early donors requesting the refund of their donations since nothing was being done with the money. Others, mainly the large contributors, said they didn't want their money back, but they wanted to see some action. A legal opinion was sought with the decision that no refunds could be made unless all monies were returned. The Astorian Budget editorialized, "It's been 10 years since the fund raising for a Veterans' Memorial Library was begun with the objective of $300,000. Approximately $60,000 was raised early ... Now there seems little likelihood of raising an additional large sum. Meanwhile $60,000 gathering dust in a bank is a poor memorial to veterans."

The Library Board Really Tried

The Veterans' Memorial Library Board decided they should set a goal commensurate with their funds, maybe purchase an existing building. Suggestions came quickly, Dr. R.W. Kullberg, president of the Clatsop County Historical Society, proposed building a wing on the south or west of the Flavel House, thus adding a public library to the museum. Bradbury Auto Company offered their site at 8th and Bond for $45,000. Myron Jones, county commissioner and new president of the Board, received a letter form Mason, Ehrman & Company offering their building at 1136 Marine Drive for $45,000. But the suggestion that received the most approval was the purchase of the vacant garage building on 11th and Exchange (now the Senior Center). The question of buying an existing building required a legal opinion. The decision was a firm "No". The money had been solicited for a new building, and so it

must be used.

The year 1958 arrived with continuing public complaints about lack of action. But the Veterans' Library Board was stymied. The money on hand was not enough to build a new building, and they could not legally buy an old one. They had no county base of support, for three times county voters had rejected a library tax. What could they do? For twelve years they had worked to build a fund too small to provide a county library building which apparently county voters didn't want, and they had on hand $60,000 which they could not return to the donors.

The City Library Had Problems Too

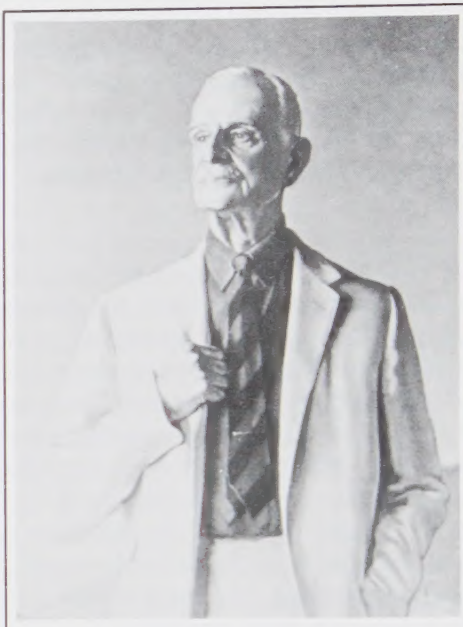
During the quandary of the Veterans' Board, the city library was having to look for a new home. For twenty years patrons had enjoyed the convenience of street-level quarters through the generosity of the Elks Lodge, which received minimal rent to cover the cost of utilities. Now the Elks needed the entire building for their own use. On March 1, 1958, the Library Board signed a two-year lease to rent the vacant garage and tire shop across from the Elks building. The move was a fairly easy one and a dramatic one too. The Jay-Cees and Jay-C-Ettes along with many other volunteers formed a book brigade, passing the books and supplies from hand to hand, placing them on the new shelves in the same order in which they had been removed.

Now a real opportunity for a county library appeared. When funds from the Federal Rural Library Act became available through the State Library, Clatsop County was the first to qualify. The two year grant provided a bookmobile, equipment, a book collection and the travelling librarian. In return, the county commissioners agreed to place on the ballot a tax measure to continue the service after the two years were up. Once again, the county patrons loved the bookmobile but they turned down the tax proposal. With this refusal, the county lost the opportunity of receiving free of charge the bookmobile, equipment and 10,000 new books which would have established a permanent county library. With no tax support coming from the county, once again free library service was limited to residents of Astoria. County residents who chose to pay a membership fee for library use were welcomed, of course.

The City Library Had A Dream

All through the years the Astoria Public Library had operated on limited budgets and in impermanent quarters, yet Board members spoke

longingly of the day when the service might have its own professional, permanent home, a place more than a repository, a building to serve the wider cultural interests of the community. But with tax measures often rejected, such a goal seemed merely a dream. Then suddenly hope sprang from an unexpected source.



JOHN JACOB ASTOR V, BARON OF HEVER

The Astor gift of $100,000 provided a large share of funds for the new building.

ENTER THE ASTORS

In 1961, Astorians held a sesquicentennial celebration to commemorate John Jacob Astor's founding of Astoria as a fur trading post in 1811. Invitations were sent to the founder's families in New York and England. To the delight of the city, Lord John Jacob Astor, Baron of Hever, and Lady Astor came from London with their family. Later, as a sequel to their visit, the Astors sent the City of Astoria a check for $100,000 to be used as a living memorial to their founding ancestor and to serve some city need.

Of course, city residents were excited, and almost every individual offered his favorite project which Mayor Harry Steinbock passed along to a committee. Among the applications receiving final consideration were a senior citizens' center and public auditorium combined, development of parkways along the river front, the building of a library complex on the campus of Clatsop Community College and a public library building with a meeting hall for the city of Astoria.

When the city library was announced as the final choice, many other factors fitted into place like the newly-found pieces of a puzzle. Though the Astor gift would not cover the entire cost of a new building, it

provided the means by which the project could qualify for other funds.

The City of Astoria provided the building site, a one-half block area between Duane and Exchange, facing 10th Street. The Veterans' Memorial Library Committee decided the building of a new facility met the requirements for which they had gathered funds, so they released the money they had accumulated over the 20-year period. With the prospect of a new building, voters in 1964 approved the increase in the library tax base.

Finances for the new structure:

Astor gift with interest	*$107,306*
Veterans' Memorial Fund	*65,602*
American Legion Post 12	*11,000*
Federal Grants	*123,000*
Citizens' contributions	*12,576*
Interest earned on funds	*7,308*
City of Astoria general fund	*43,300*
Library Fund	*8,000*
	$378,092

With funds assured, plans moved ahead with speed. Architects Ernest and Ebba Brown designed the 8,000 square-ft. steel frame building. Albert J. Mittet served as general contractor with sub-contracts going to local companies. When Katherine Laiblin, library director,

ASTOR LIBRARY

Tenth Street entrance of the Astor Library, dedicated on October 8, 1967.

resigned to go to another locality, Mary Mason became acting director. On January 1, 1967, Bruce Berney, professional librarian, arrived to take over the position, with the library still located in the renovated garage on 11th and Exchange.

ASTOR LIBRARY & VETERANS MEMORIAL

South entrance to Astor Library and Veterans Memorial.

THE DREAM COMES TRUE

One of the first tasks Berney found waiting was to raise money. As the structure was nearing completion, inflation had diminished the building fund until there was no money left for furnishings. Library enthusiasts rallied to the call with silver teas and solicitations. The Beta Sigma Phi Sorority sponsored an open-house event in the newly-restored, historic Judge Page house. Leonard Vernon opened his home where organists Betty Phillips, Lloyd Ferrell and Don French presented a concert on Vernon's rebuilt organ. All these efforts brought in several thousand dollars by which the library was adequately and tastefully furnished.

Contractor Mittet began actual construction of the building in June 1966 and completed the work in August 1967. In mid-September when furnishings and equipment were in place, the day of the big move arrived. Volunteers headed by the Jay-Cees and Tongue Point Job Corps placed books and supplies into labeled cartons and transported them by fork lift trucks from the old building to the new quarters a block away. There the workers placed the contents of the cartons into their assigned locations. The major move was accomplished in one day.

Then on October 8th, only three weeks later, a standing-room-only crowd gathered in the main reading room for the dedication. Plans had been in the making for months. Once again members of the Astor family

came from London. Robert Hanson, master of ceremonies, and Dr. Robert Neikes, chairman of the library board, welcomed the guests. Governor Tom McCall and Lord Gavin Astor gave dedicatory speeches. Architect Ernest Brown presented the building to the City of Astoria with acceptance by Mayor Harry Steinbock and Library Director Bruce Berney.

As a dramatic conclusion to the ceremonies, contingents from American Legion, Post 12, and Veterans of Foreign Wars, Post 371, posted the colors in the south unit of the building designated as "The Flag Room, dedicated to the men and women of Clatsop County who served their country in time of war."

Thus the faithful Veterans Memorial Library Association at long last gained its goal of providing a living memorial. And after 75 years and five prior moves, the Astoria Public Library was established in a home of its own, a fine new building designed for the fulfillment of its cultural purposes.

The New Building Brought New Opportunities

The new building opened a whole new era of library services. For 25 years those services have been enriched and expanded. A good library is an asset to any community, and the Astoria Public Library ranks high among those of cities this size. The use of its facilities increases from year to year.

The Flag Room, meeting room of the Veterans' Memorial wing, is in almost constant use, both daytime and evening, with reservations required.

In some respects, the library is a collage of smaller libraries. One of these is the Children's Library, a rich collection of children's classics and annual award-winning publications. Young readers enjoy the area enlivened by colorful posters, puzzles, and the welcome of the friendly cat carved by artist Michael DeWaide. Story hours presented by volunteer story tellers are highlights of the children's program.

Another such library within a library is the Whitney Genealogical Library begun in 1973 as a gift from Dorothy Whitney, early Seaside high school librarian. When her eyesight failed, she chose the Astoria Public Library as a depository for her prized volumes. In the ensuing years, many groups and individuals have added valuable material until the Whitney section is regarded as one of the finest genealogical

resources in the Northwest.

The Astoriana collection is another unique feature of the library. It started in the early years with gifts of books on local history and by local authors. Many rare editions and manuscripts have been added. Included in the section are card indexes of local newspapers beginning in 1873, military records, city directories, maps, phone books, and City of Astoria clipping scrapbooks. The micro-fiche and film readers also provide assistance. The aggregate is a deposit of materials priceless for research.

The library has an extensive, historic photo collection, such as the more than 2,000 prints, negatives, and slides of Fort Stevens from its beginnings during the Civil War. The collection was assembled by author and technical archivist Marshall Hanft, Oregon State Library. The Astoria Library was chosen as the repository for his works because of the rich resources and assistance it had supplied during his research.

The Library Offers More Than Books

Through the years, the Library has received numerous rare gifts. Among its display of artistic treasures is the bronze bust of Astoria's founder, John Jacob Astor. It was presented by the people of Walldorf, Germany, Astor's birthplace and Astoria's sister city. It is a replica of the large original mounted in the courtyard of the Astor Haus Museum in Walldorf.

The cedar carving of the thunderbird revered by Indians since ancient times soars on the north wall of the reading room. This rare work was created by a master craftsman of the Macah tribe at Neah Bay. Legend says that the great bird lives on a high mountain, rolls thunder eggs (Oregon's state rock) into the valleys below, and in times of danger, swoops down to protect or avenge. The carving is on loan from Dr. R.P. Moore.

Another fine piece on display is the sculpture "Arrival", depicting Lewis and Clark at the end of their journey to the Pacific in 1805. The statuette, is a replica of the larger-than-life original at Fort Clatsop. A creation of local sculptor Stanley Wanlass, winner of international acclaim, the bronze was given in 1981 by Esther Pernu, longtime benefactor of the library.

The happy scene on the west wall of the reading room was painted by Joe Knowles, important Northwest artist. His major work was the thirty-six murals in the lobby of the Monticello Hotel, Longview, WA. "The Picnic" was commissioned by the Lower Columbia Cooperative

Dairy Association to sell ice cream. Eventually it became the property of the City of Astoria and was professionally restored by the volunteer skill of artist Stanley Wanlass.

Displays of crafts and unusual collections appear regularly in the glass case in the reading room. These offer opportunities for collectors and craftsmen to display their interests and for viewers to enjoy the exhibits. Walls of the Flag Room provide a setting for shows hung by local art guilds and by the art departments of city and county schools. Traveling exhibits are scheduled when available.

Library patrons have the privilege of borrowing framed pictures to hang on their walls at home for a period of six weeks. The assortment of original and reproduced works of art initiated in 1974, now numbers more than 100 selections.

Visitors to the library have the rare opportunity to view a first edition of the Lewis and Clark Journals. Their notes were transcribed and published within five years after their return in 1806. The Library copy in its sealed viewing case was a $2,500 gift from the Astoria Rotary Club in 1972. A first edition of Washington Irving's *Astoria* was a gift from Joseph Saari, former Astorian.

Library Services Keep Up With The Times

In addition to a check-out supply of thousands of books and a comprehensive supply of magazines and newspapers for daily use of the reading room patrons, the library offers extensive audio services with more than 2,500 records, cassette tapes and video cassettes, many of these donated by friends who want to pass them along.

The Astor Library Friends Association (ALFA), active since March 1973, has been responsible for helping the Library acquire much of the newer equipment. It promotes cultural and historical observances such as honoring the city's founder, John Jacob Astor, and native Astorian Ranald MacDonald, first teacher of English in Japan.

The Library Has Business Duties Too

Maintenance details require continuous attention to keep the building convenient and pleasant for the patrons. The only structural change since its completion in 1967 occurred twenty years later when the size of the mezzanine was doubled, adding shelf space for 15,000 more books. Completion was celebrated in March 1987 when Mayor Edith

Henningsgaard cut the traditional ribbon.

In 1985, interested citizens tried once again to organize a county library. This time they approached the project in two steps. In the first election, county voters approved the creation of the North Clatsop Library District. In the second election they turned down the tax levy required to support it. So the library continues as a city function, but the county residents may enjoy full services for the payment of an annual fee of $36.00 per family or $20.00 for six months. In 1990 two hundred twenty-five county families were regular users.

For years the library operated on its own city tax base. Then in 1980, due to legislative changes, it was determined that any local taxing unit can have only one tax base; in this case, the City of Astoria. So since that time, the library budget receives its proportionate amount from the City's general fund.

When Measure 5, the State's property tax limitation law, became effective July 1, 1991, the library along with other city functions suffered approximately one-third loss in revenue. The Library Board had to take the dismal step of eliminating one full-time and two half-time staff positions, cutting magazine subscriptions and the purchase of many new books. To compensate, patrons were asked to share their magazines and their money, and faithful volunteers assumed some staff duties. Hours were reduced from 72 hours per week to 59. Even so, circulation increased, reaching a total of 128,320 in 1990-91.

Local residents and visitors from near and far frequently express their admiration for its professional facilities and its extensive resources. Now the Astoria Public Library celebrates its one hundredth anniversary and plans for years of service ahead.

LIBRARY DIRECTORS

P. Sturgis, 1892-93
Ellen Geary, 1904
Margaret Upshur, 1904-14
Katherine Barker, 1914-1941
Glenn Buch, 1941-46
Philip Blodgett, 1947-49
Irene Brooke, 1950-58
Patricia Fisher, 1959-61
Elmer Fisher, 1962-64
Katherine Laiblin, 1964-66
Mary Mason (acting), 1966
Bruce Berney, 1967-

Bruce Berney, director of Astoria Public Library since 1967

Berney has his BA degree from University of Puget Sound; MA degree, Lewis and Clark College; and MA degree in Library Science, University of Washington.

He has taught in high schools in Washington state and in Toyama, Japan. He is the only library director to serve in the present building since he helped with the move 25 years ago.

Author:

Vera Gault, retired college English instructor and local historian

Editor:

Jean McKinney, retired library assistant, Astor Public Library.

Photographer:

Curtis McKinney